

Your Plymouth

Monday 8 September 2014

PRESENT:

Councillor Kate Taylor, in the Chair.

Councillor Sam Leaves, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Damarell, Philippa Davey, Downie, Martin Leaves, Rennie, Ricketts, Riley, Sparling and Tuohy.

Co-opted Representative: Mr Steve Meakin.

Also in attendance: Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader, David Draffan, Assistant Director for Economic Development, Hannah Daw, Policy and Business Planning Officer, Paul Brookes, History Centre Manager, Councillor Vincent, Cabinet Member for Environment, Tom Cox, Project Manager, Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety, Pete Aley, Head of Community Services, Peter Honeywell, Transformation Programmes Manager, Ross Johnston, Transformation Project Officer, Faye Batchelor-Hambleton, Assistant Director for Customer Services, Sarah Hopkins, Community Safety and Partnership Manager, Ann Thorp, Service Manager (Customer Services), Di Charlton, Service Development and Partnership Manager (Lead Officer) and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 3 pm and finished at 5.03 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

12. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following declarations of interest were made –

Name	Minute Number and Subject	Reason	Interest
Steve Meakin	18 – Emergency Welfare Scheme Update	Work with the CAB who hold some of the funding	Personal
Councillor Sam Leaves	15c – Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety	Private sector housing Landlord	Personal

Name	Minute Number and Subject	Reason	Interest
Councillor Martin Leaves	15c – Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety	Private sector housing Landlord	Personal
Councillor Riley	15c – Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety	Private sector housing Landlord	Personal

13. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

14. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 10 March, 22 April and 9 June 2014.

15. **OVERVIEW OF PRIORITIES**

15.1 **Deputy Leader**

The panel heard from the Deputy Leader who was in attendance to provide an overview of his portfolio responsibilities. Councillor Smith identified the following three priority areas within his portfolio which he felt could benefit from scrutiny –

- History Centre
- Framework for Working with Citizens and Communities
- First Stop Shop

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that –

- (a) the Council had successfully been awarded over £12m in Heritage Lottery Funding toward the cost of the project, and this money was being released in two phases;
- (b) the History Centre would enable many of the city's impressive collections to be brought together in one place, including elements of Plymouth's long and successful maritime history, and the city's record office;
- (c) an enormous amount of public engagement and consultation had been undertaken, including a double-page feature in the

Herald, pop-up museums, meetings with community groups in addition to information being published on the Council's website. However, more was still to come and if Members were aware of any interested community groups they should let Councillor Smith or the officers know;

- (d) all of the services offered by the Council's existing First Stop facility would transfer across to the new First Stop Shop. This would be further enhanced via the support of the meet and greet service and the availability to customers of self-serve computers.

15.2 **Cabinet Member for Environment**

The panel heard from the Cabinet Member for Environment who was in attendance to provide an overview of his portfolio responsibilities. Councillor Vincent identified the following three priority areas within his portfolio which he felt could benefit from scrutiny –

- Deliver Waste Collection Reorganisation
- Improve Efficiency within Garage and Fleet Services
- Create a Brilliant Co-operative Street Service

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that –

- (a) lessons had been learned from the last waste reorganisation and existing staffing levels had been retained with an extra focus on training so that staff were fully aware of the new routes and had been fully briefed on collection policies;
- (b) assisted collections would continue with staff being more vigilant in identifying properties where this service was no longer required. In addition, in terms of promoting the assisted collection service, officers had been in contact with the Plymouth disability network and were using similar networks to advertise its availability to those who need it;
- (c) bins which were lost or damaged would be replaced and delivered at a cost of £15. However, new bins could be collected from a number of specified collection points by the householder free of charge (low income households would not be charged for replacement bins);
- (d) overloaded bins would continue to be emptied but notices left with householders as part of a sustained approach to education and enforcement in areas of the City where waste habits have had a detrimental effect on the amenity. This included liaison with the University and landlords regarding student accommodation.

15.3 **Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety**

The panel heard from the Cabinet Member for Co-operatives, Housing and Community Safety who was in attendance to provide an overview of his portfolio responsibilities. Councillor Penberthy identified the following three priority areas within his portfolio which he felt could benefit from scrutiny –

- Community Safety
- Housing – Private Sector and Homelessness
- Financial Inclusion – Welfare, Payday Lending etc.

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that –

- (a) there wasn't currently a performance indicator on the time it took for landlord's getting people into accommodation, however, as it was in everyone's best interests, the City Council could work in partnership with social landlords to identify actions to address voids and to ensure that properties were available to let at the earliest opportunity;
- (b) the Council maintained a comprehensive approach to dealing with long term empty dwellings utilising a wide range of actions to bring properties back into use. If Members were aware of any empty properties in their wards they should bring them to the attention of the Housing Options team;
- (c) the Council took a firm stance with landlords whose properties were of a poor standard/quality and, where cases were brought to its attention, steps were taken to work with the tenant to take action but this was a long and resource intense process;
- (d) there had been a 40 per cent increase in demand for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) as a result of the introduction of the Bedroom Tax – between April and June 2014 £33,836 and been paid to 157 customers compared to the same period in 2013 of £25,557 to 112 customers;
- (e) the exact number of people claiming DHP who were in work wasn't known however in Plymouth between February 2012 and February 2014 there had been a 22 per cent increase in claimants.

(Steve Meakin and Councillors Sam Leaves, Martin Leaves and Riley declared personal interests in respect of the above item).

(Councillor Ricketts left the meeting immediately after this item).

16. **CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY**

The panel received an update on progress with the Customer Access Strategy, ahead of the co-operative review. In attendance for the purposes of the briefing were Faye Batchelor-Hambleton, Assistant Director for Customer Services, Peter Honeywell, Transformation Programmes Manager, and Ross Johnston, Transformation Project Officer. Members were advised that –

- (a) the new city centre first stop shop, which was being designed around a retail bank model, would be more customer focussed and friendly with staff trained to assist in a much wider range of customer queries and needs. Included within the facility would be a number of self-service points where customers could access services directly themselves with assistance being available on-hand if required. Most significantly of all, the shop would be open late on a Thursday evening and on a Saturday morning and it was currently expected that the shop would open to coincide with the first late night Christmas shopping event;
- (b) following feedback, the 'Customer Access Strategy' had been renamed the 'Customer Service Strategy';
- (c) one of the biggest challenges faced by the Council, besides meeting the demands of face-to-face customers, was the volume of telephone calls. An automated messaging service was therefore being developed which would give callers various options to select without the need to immediately speak to a member of staff (this option being the last with the caller being asked to hold to be connected). With simple and straight forward requests being filtered out, the call centre staff would be freed up to concentrate on front line/high priority issues;
- (d) work continued on reviewing and rationalising the Council's digital service to ensure that it was easier to use and that old information was not unnecessarily retained. It was also hoped that more use could be made of the highly successful 'Plymouth App';
- (e) the new Customer Service Strategy was part of a package of documents, including the Customer and Service Blueprint, Customer and Service Roadmap and Implementation Plan, which would be presented to Cabinet on 9 November 2014;
- (f) the strategy was required in order to –
 - transform the way the City Council interacts with customers and ensure uniformity of standards across the authority;
 - outline the standards customers can expect when interacting with the Council;
 - deliver services efficiently and cost effectively to all service consumers;
 - align and co-ordinate the necessary changes across the Council;

- respond quickly to changing environmental pressure, political pressure and social pressure.

A copy of the draft Customer Services Strategy 2014-2017 summary document was tabled and Members were invited to submit their comments via e-mail to the Transformation Project Officer by Friday 12 September 2014.

It was proposed that a half-day co-operative review could be undertaken in October to –

- review the full Customer Service Strategy;
- explain and promote the Customer and Service Blueprint and Roadmap;
- scrutinise the Implementation Plan and outlined actions

With regard to the co-operative review, the Chair and Democratic Support Officer would canvas members' interest outside of the meeting.

(Members expressed concern about information being 'tabled' at the meeting and commented that it would be much more beneficial to the debate, and in terms of preparation, for them to have sight of all documentation in advance of meetings).

17. **SAFER PLYMOUTH PARTNERSHIP - CRIME STATISTICS UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Penberthy and Sarah Hopkins, Community Safety and Partnerships Manager, who were in attendance to update the panel on the latest crime statistics for the City. Members were informed of the highlights of the report which included that –

- during April to July 2014 Plymouth had seen an overall decrease in crimes compared to the same period the previous year;
- Safer Plymouth (formerly Plymouth Community Safety Partnership) had been going through a period of review and development, including a refresh of its terms of reference and membership;
- as part of its annual Partnership Strategic Assessment of Crime and Disorder, Safer Plymouth had agreed the following performance measures for 2014/15 –
 - Reducing the gap between the worst neighbourhoods for crime and the city average
 - Reducing violence with injury (excluding domestic abuse)
 - Increasing domestic abuse reporting
 - Increasing first time reporting of domestic abuse
 - Reducing anti-social behaviour

and the following new target –

- Increasing the number of vulnerable victims of anti-social

behaviour supported by the vulnerable victim service

- (d) due to the considerable reduction in serious acquisitive crime over the last couple of years and, in order to maintain a focus on crimes affecting the most vulnerable and causing the most harm, Safer Plymouth had agreed to monitor levels of serious acquisitive crime only;
- (e) hate crime was seriously under-reported and work was under way to get a better understanding of it in order to be able to intervene at the earliest opportunity.

In response to questions raised, Members heard further that –

- (f) the Partnership was working closely with the Fire Service to tackle the recent increase in incidents of arson, the total number of incidents to date was not available however a breakdown of the number of incidents by area across the city would be circulated to panel members after the meeting;
- (g) a great deal of work had been done in the City with regards hate crime over the past two years, working with diverse groups and communities on building relations and establishing a number of different reporting mechanism.

(Members expressed concern about information being ‘tabled’ at the meeting and commented that it would be much more beneficial to the debate, and in terms of preparation, for them to have sight of all documentation in advance of meetings).

18. **EMERGENCY WELFARE SCHEME UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, and Ann Thorpe, Service Manager, who were in attendance to provide an update on progress with delivery of the Emergency and Welfare Fund (EWF) following its implementation in April 2013. Highlights of the report included –

- that Government funding for the scheme had been cut at the end of year 2 and, in preparation for this, the Council had taken steps to minimise spend whilst continuing to support the most vulnerable;
- a number of initiatives had been set up to deliver support aimed at early interventions and prevention to minimise future demands on the scheme;
- leaving options open for spreading the remaining budget for 2014/15 (£31,048,567) over future years to allow some level of support to continue;
- customer demand for the service had increased as the scheme had progressed and the average monthly spend was now at £51,287, an increase of 53 per cent.

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that -

- (a) those who could currently benefit from the scheme included –
- young families who had been through the young families programme;
 - people with no money to buy food;
 - someone who needed help to buy clothes for work or an interview;
 - someone requiring assistance with travel costs to get to a family funeral

The concern was that if this fund was no longer available, or limited further by reduced funding, where would these people go for help;

- (b) a geographical breakdown on a ward by ward basis demonstrating where in the City the applications were coming from could be provided and this would be circulated to panel members after the meeting.

The Chair commented on the work of the Plymouth Energy Company and commended its use of volunteers and apprentices.

19. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

The panel noted the tracking resolutions schedule monitoring progress against its previous recommendations.

20. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel considered its work programme for 2014/15 and noted that –

- (a) the Problem Debt co-operative review would commence on 15 October 2014;
- (b) a series of workshops had been arranged in relation to the ‘Framework for Working with Citizens and Communities’, to take place as follows –
- 6 October and 10 October (Reception Room, Council House)
 - 14 October (Charter Room, Guildhall)
- (c) with regard to minute 16 above, an e-mail would be sent to councillors canvassing interest in the Customer Service Strategy co-operative review.

Agreed that Tony Hogg, Police and Crime Commissioner, is invited to attend the panel’s meeting on 16 March 2015 when the next update on crime statistics will be presented.

21. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.